State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Commission on Children

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Governor Signs Prevention Bill

Legislation Prioritizes Cost-Effective Investment in Children, Youth and Families

With legislative leaders looking on, Governor M. Jodi Rell today signed a law that puts Connecticut on a course toward investing its budget dollars more wisely by focusing on programs that prevent children, youth, and families from falling into crisis.

Behind the cutting-edge legislation, approved unanimously by the 2006 General Assembly, is the realization that state government does too much "crisis" spending – paying huge sums to deal with the results of children and youth landing in trouble, including incarceration, remedial and special education, and higher health care costs.

Public Act 06-179, *An Act Concerning State Investment in Prevention*, seeks to prevent children and youth from falling behind – and save taxpayer dollars in the process. Among other things, it sets a goal for all state agencies that serve children and families: allocating at least 10 percent of their budgets to prevention services by the year 2020. Current prevention spending stands at about 2.8 percent of those agencies' budgets. The governor will be required to report on the progress toward meeting the goal. (See the attached fact sheet for more details.)

Prevention programs do more than save children and families from misery; they also save the state from more expensive spending later on. For instance, it has been shown that every dollar invested in high-quality preschool programs for low-income Connecticut children can produce $18.90 in monetary benefits.

"Focusing on prevention not only makes sense for the well being of our children, but also makes fiscal sense with future savings in areas such as juvenile justice and unemployment," said Speaker of the House Jim Amann of Milford, a prime mover of the legislation. "Whether it's school readiness, after-school programs, or healthcare for children, these are all areas that deserve more resources and make a great long-term investment for taxpayers."

Commission on Children Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman likened the concept to creating a good stock portfolio. “You invest early in what works, and the dividends for everyone – children, families, taxpayers – are tremendous,” she said. “We have proven practices for creating good child outcomes in health, safety, and learning. They include home visitation, school readiness, after-school programs, and early reading interventions. Done the right way, these programs can result in everything from reduced child abuse to making lifelong learners out of children.”

Zimmerman noted that the new law requires frequent reporting to the public on the state’s progress in making this spending shift. In addition to the governor, state departments must report on their changes, show research supporting their decisions, and submit data on the outcomes.

“We are about to see a shift not just in investment but in public accountability,” Zimmerman said. “Connecticut will be the first state to put into public policy the knowledge that investment in what works saves both dignity and dollars.”

Stephen Ristau, President and CEO of the Governor's Prevention Partnership, said the bill-signing demonstrates Connecticut’s national leadership in prevention programs. “By developing broad, coherent prevention policies, a well-coordinated infrastructure to carry out such policies, and by investing in proven strategies that assure our children and youth successful outcomes academically, socially and vocationally, Connecticut will distinguish itself once more for its socially progressive and fiscally prudent approach,” Ristau said.

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Facts about Connecticut's Prevention Law

A Connecticut prevention law enacted in 2006 encourages investment in proven, cost-effective prevention services that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. The law promotes prosperity and success for Connecticut's children and families, rather than just crisis management.

The law, known formally as An Act Concerning State Investment in Prevention (P.A. 06-179), takes the following steps to strengthen Connecticut's prevention investment:

- Reactivates the State Prevention Council's work and sharpens its prevention mission;
- Revives the Governor's biennial prevention budget and aligns it with child and family prevention goals already in Connecticut law;
- Requires the Governor to report on the state's progress toward meeting the goal that, by the year 2020, 10 percent of the budgets of state agencies serving children and families will be allocated for prevention services; and
- Directs these state agencies to report annually on the effectiveness of their prevention services and their efforts to improve child outcomes.

It pays to invest in the front end. Growing evidence reveals that prevention programs can be effective at reducing crime and other significant costs to society. According to new findings by the Community Results Center of the United Way of Connecticut:

- Every dollar invested in home visitation for high-risk families, if implemented in Connecticut using a nurse-family model, would produce $6.12 in monetary benefits.
- Every dollar invested in high-quality preschool for low-income Connecticut children, if modeled after the High/Scope Perry Preschool program, would produce $18.89 in monetary benefits.

The law also reflects a commitment to the importance of government accountability to the state's taxpayers. Connecticut citizens will have access to updated data and analysis on the state's investment in prevention. State agencies will have to spell out the effectiveness of their prevention programs, as well as their efforts to reduce disparities in child outcomes by race, income level and gender.

In 2001, Connecticut enacted the first state law in the nation to require a statewide comprehensive prevention plan and required the Governor to report on the state's prevention investment and planning (P.A. 01-121). In FY 2002, Connecticut spent only an estimated 2 to 3 percent of its budget on prevention programs serving children and their families. By expanding the state's prevention analysis and reporting at the state department level, the 2006 law takes the next step toward shifting taxpayer dollars from wasteful crisis spending to cost-effective prevention investment.

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